I See the Earth...

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Yuri Gagarin

March 13, 2025

YURI GAGARIN

I SEE THE EARTH ...

A Documentary Account for Young School Children

Annotation
A Documentary Narrative by Pilot-Cosmonaut and Hero of the Soviet Union, Y.A. Gagarin, About the Preparation and Execution of the World's First Manned Spaceflight.

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Our Gagarin

This book contains Yuri Gagarin's documentary narrative *I See the Earth...* It was written long ago, shortly after the flight — the first human spaceflight in Earth's history. Gagarin recounted his life, how he became a cosmonaut, and how he carried out the mission. He told his story simply and modestly, just as he did everything in life.

Now, his account may seem too brief, so we would like to add a little more to it.

Yuri Gagarin's name is now known to everyone — both children and adults. His spaceflight marked the beginning of a new era in our planet's history — the era of humanity's conquest of interplanetary space.

Speaking about Gagarin is both easy and difficult. He was an ordinary yet remarkable person, with a captivating smile. But Yuri was not just cheerful, not just courageous, not just strong-willed. He possessed immense energy—an active, highly talented, and multifaceted individual.

When I think of Gagarin, I do not recall the first days of our acquaintance during cosmonaut selection or even the joint training sessions for the Vostok mission. Instead, I remember the day we arrived together at the launch pad of the cosmodrome.

Years have passed, yet the thoughts and emotions remain as vivid in my memory as if it all happened just yesterday.

The minutes of preparation for launch had already passed, and the clock's hand was finally approaching the decisive mark. The final moment was inevitably drawing near. With each second, the anticipation grew more intense.

We looked towards the towering rocket over the vast steppe. Silver and enormous, it almost merged with the blue sky and seemed to tremble — perhaps from the heat haze rising over the awakening steppe, or perhaps

from its impatience to break free from Earth and rush into the cosmic abyss.

Final instructions came through the radio. The launch team reported that all preparations were complete — Silence fell. Everyone awaited his message.

We braced ourselves to hear his voice. Yet, the moment the loudspeaker crackled to life, we all involuntarily shuddered. His voice came through—clear, confident:

> All spacecraft systems are functioning normally! Ready for launch!

Silence fell once more. The tension reached its peak.

We stood together—spacecraft designers, members of the government commission, scientists, cosmonauts... And it felt as if the entire ancient history of humankind stood behind us, waiting for an answer: how would we account for all that had been achieved? The long, arduous journey from a stone knife to this extraordinary satellite-ship?

How would we answer the immense willpower of the great thinkers of the past — Archimedes and Copernicus, Galileo and Bruno, Lomonosov and Newton, Kibalchich and Tsiolkovsky, the engineers and theorists of our time?

And now, Yuri was the one to fulfil humanity's efforts to unravel nature's mysteries, to complete the colossal work of scientists, engineers, and workers who had created the Vostok spacecraft, to realise the eternal dream of breaking free from Earth's gravity. The silence was shattered by a single word:

Launch! "Let's go-o-o!"

— we heard Yuri's ringing voice. And in that moment, we felt, even more sharply than he did, the full force of the rocket's twenty million horsepower engines straining to propel him into space.

A deafening roar, fire, smoke, and more fire swept across the steppe. The silver rocket slowly lifted off the launch pad, as if reluctant to leave the Earth. Then its speed increased. Soon, it was racing like a brilliant comet...

And then it disappeared from sight altogether.

The tension of those final seconds before launch vanished, fading beyond the horizon of the sunlit steppe, just as the thunder of the rocket engines dissolved into the sky.

That is how I remember the dawn of the space age.

Do you remember how the whole world re-

joiced? "Citizen of the Universe" — that is what people called Yuri on every continent of the Earth. He was applauded by the people of Europe and Asia, Africa and Latin America. In small villages and great capitals, he was welcomed as one of their own, an honoured and long-awaited guest.

He became an honorary citizen of hundreds of cities, and the governments of many nations awarded him their highest decorations and orders.

And then a heavy burden fell on Yuri's shoulders—the burden of fame. This was a new and extraordinary test, one not included in the cosmonaut training programme.

But Yura remained the same as before. Not for a moment did he forget that he was a member of our team, and he continued to perform the same duties as before, helping others with their studies and training.

After Gagarin's flight, Russian was heard in space more than once, and in the transmissions of every new cosmonaut, his voice was always there too. He accompanied every Soviet cosmonaut into space, sharing in each mission with them.

I said "the burden of fame." Yuri deeply understood the part he played in the great achievement of his people and the heroic work of scientists. He was a strong person—he did not let fame consume him, he endured, and he did not allow anyone to turn him into a "star." He remained a true human being.

He managed to channel this fame for the benefit of the common cause. He grew with each passing day. This was evident in everything—in his public work, in our space missions. He prepared for a new flight just like everyone else. He flew aircraft, parachuted, and regularly undertook various tests. His example set a high standard for others.

We all saw his abilities. We saw how quickly and effortlessly he grasped scientific problems and the complexities of space technology. He was always willing to share his knowledge with others.

But it was Academician Sergei Pavlovich Korolev who first recognised these qualities in Yuri — who saw in him the makings of a scientist. He noticed that Yura combined natural courage, an analytical mind, and exceptional diligence. "I believe," said Sergei Pavlovich one day, "that if he receives a solid education, we will one day hear his name among the great scientists of our country."

And Yuri did receive a solid education.

At the beginning of 1968, he graduated from the Zhukovsky Air Force Engineering Academy. His diploma thesis attracted the attention of professors and lecturers for its deep analysis and scientific boldness.

Gagarin was a true friend. You could rely on him in both work and personal matters. Everyone felt at ease with him—his friends, acquaintances, and the young people he spent much time with at congresses, conferences, and gatherings.

In his free time, Yuri loved hunting, fishing, spending time with his family, and wandering outside the city with his daughters. He was proud of his daughters—proud that they never boasted about having a famous father, proud of their achievements in school and music, proud of their kindness.

Often, on weekends, he would travel with his wife and children to his native Gzhatsk to visit his parents.

I remember an evening in April 1961 — the evening after Yuri's flight into space. We walked together along the banks of the Volga. What did we talk about then?

The doors to space had been opened, and we dreamed of the future. But no matter how bold our dreams were, we could not have foreseen how rapidly the era of human spaceflight would unfold.

The era of spaceflight, which began on 12 April 1961, developed with astonishing speed.

Yuri Gagarin's flight was a great achievement, a tremendous victory for the Soviet people. People rejoiced, they celebrated, but soon they realised—it was not enough!

There were many other extremely challenging Soviet space missions: the first group flight, the first spacewalk. Still not enough! An automated station made a soft landing on the Moon. Not enough! And when a human stepped onto the Moon's surface, people rejoiced again, but soon they said once more—not enough!

Then, cosmonauts in Earth's orbit built an experimental scientific station — a prototype for extraterrestrial settlements. Still not enough!

Scientists and cosmonauts will continue advancing into the mysteries of nature, "conquering the entire circumsolar space," as the great Tsiolkovsky predicted.

Such is human nature — it cannot stop at what has been achieved. It will never be satisfied in its desire to understand the world around it, the entire universe.

For this dream, Yuri Gagarin lived. For this

dream, the first citizen of the Universe accomplished his feat.

HERMAN TITOV

Pilot-Cosmonaut,
Hero of the Soviet Union

Tell us how you became a cosmonaut...

I first read this phrase a few days after returning from space, as I reviewed letters received from almost every corner of the Soviet Union.

Of course, young people, children, are most interested in my life. We often meet with boys and girls. And one of the first questions is always:

> How did you become a cosmonaut?

You answer, tell them about the flight, but some kids look with disbelief.

"He must be hiding some main secret," thinks one.

"It can't be that an ordinary boy became a cosmonaut!" reasons another.

"Your life, Yuri Alexeyevich, was not like others",— a schoolgirl once confidently told me.

Let this story about my life serve as proof that there are no secrets on my path to space.

April 12, 1961. Near a newsstand.

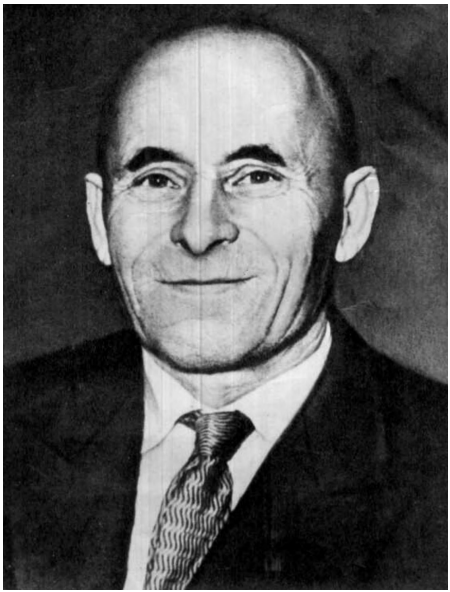
For Now Everything Is Earthly

My childhood was spent in the village of Klushino, Smolensk Oblast, and then in the small town of Gzhatsk. My father and mother, like my grandparents, were peasants. I laughed heartily when I learned that someone abroad had spread a rumor that I came from the noble family of Prince Gagarins, who owned palaces and serfs before the revolution...

My parents are now elderly. They were born before the victory of Soviet power, so they could not receive an education. After all, before 1917, even four grades of school were not accessible to all peasant children. But I remember how people in the village said: "Golden hands of Alexei Gagarin!"

Indeed, my father could do any work—carpentry, masonry, farming, and locksmithing. He taught us, his three sons and daughter, to do the same. We were proud when we first accomplished something without the help of our elders: whether it was harnessing a horse, fitting an axe to a handle, or fixing a fence...

My mother read a lot. She could answer almost any question I had. She seemed, and still seems, to me an inexhaustible source of life wisdom.



Oleksii Ivanovych Gagarin.

I took my studies seriously. I didn't chase after good grades in my report card; I just wanted to know as much as possible and learn everything as quickly as possible.

But I made a mistake with the word "report card." In fact, in the Klushino school, which I entered on September 1, 1941, there were no report cards at all. The war was on. Two classes—first and third—were taught simultaneously in one small room. Then, in the second shift, the second and fourth classes were taught. Even notebooks were a rarity. Often, we had to write on the margins of newspapers or pieces of wallpaper...

The war raged on...

Hanna Tymofiivka Gagarina.

Once, returning from school with friends, we saw two Soviet planes low in the

sky.

Look! — someone exclaimed. —

Is one of them damaged?

Indeed, a small fighter was tilting from one wing to the other and descending lower and lower. The other plane was circling above it like a bird over another, wounded one. The pilot must have struggled to keep the plane from crashing. He managed to land the machine on a peat bog near the village. The plane broke apart during the landing, but the pilot managed to jump out of the cabin.

The second one is landing!

And indeed, the second plane landed nearby, in a field. The pilot did not abandon his friend in need. They spent the night in Klushino, and in the morning, both flew away in the functional aircraft.

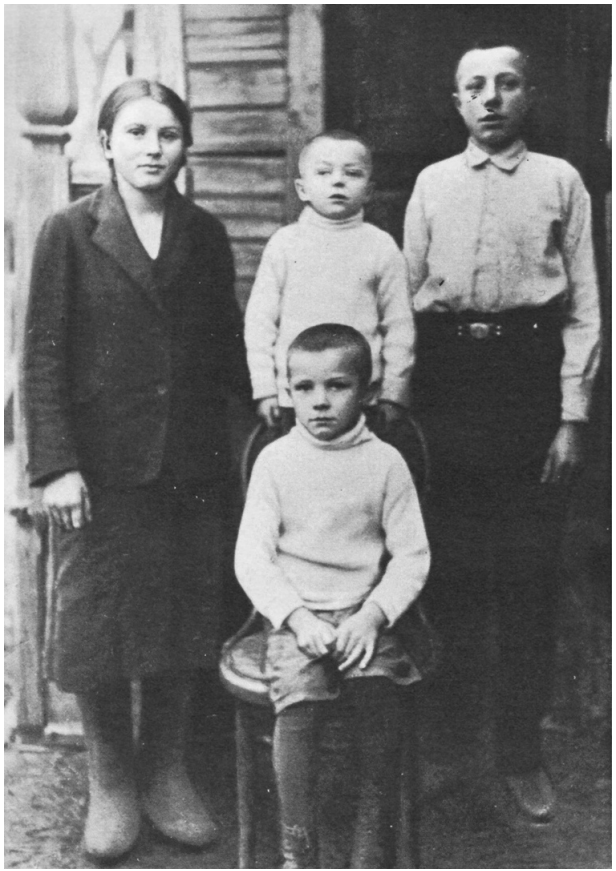
"Save yourself, but rescue your comrade" — this proverb I heard many times later from former frontline soldiers, from instructors in the aero club, from commanders in aviation units where I served. But I had long known what this proverb meant: the incident with the two pilots, their courage, I will never forget.

The war brought many hardships. We moved to Gzhatsk, but even there we had to endure much grief and deprivation. Every piece of bread was accounted for. And in 1949, when I turned fifteen, I decided to leave my studies in secondary school to start helping my parents sooner. The goal was clear: to go work at a factory and then study part-time. Many Gzhatsk teenagers did the same.

Of course, neither my mother nor my father wanted to part with me; they thought I was still young, although they themselves had worked at that age. Eventually, they decided that I would go to Moscow, to my uncle, who would advise me on what to do next.

My uncle advised me to go to a vocational school at a factory of agricultural machinery in Lyubertsy, a suburb of Moscow.

At the school, my future profession was determined, although it was not destined to become my main one: a mold maker in the foundry shop. The profession is not an easy one. It requires not only knowledge and experience but also great physical strength. But there was still free time. It was enough for carrying out Komsomol assignments and for playing basketball, which I always enjoyed, despite my not very tall height.



Yuri Gagarin (sitting) together with his elder brother Valentin, younger brother Boris, and sister Zoya.

The house in the village of Klushino, Gzhatsk District, where Yuri A. Gagarin spent his childhood.

It became harder when I enrolled in an evening school for working youth. I had to regret that the day has only twenty-four hours. But I finished school. And then the administration of the vocational school helped me and a few of my friends to enter an industrial technical school in Saratov on the Volga. In the same foundry specialty, far from airplanes and even more so from space matters.

However, it was in Saratov that I developed an illness that has no name in medicine—an irresistible attraction to the sky, a desire to fly.

How Did It Start?

Various clubs and sections operated at the technical school. I continued to play basketball and loved swimming. But an unusual passion for physics emerged. Clearly, the influence of my first physics teacher in Gzhatsk, Lev Mikhailovich Bezpalov, who knew how to engage students, was evident. In the technical school, physics lessons were taught by Nikolai Ivanovich Moskvin. We watched the experiments in the physics lab as if they were some kind of magic.

In Saratov, of course, I had to study physics at a different level. Here, in the physics club, I delivered two presentations. The first was about the work of the Russian scientist Lebedev on light pressure. The second presentation was titled *K.E. Tsiolkovsky and His Teachings on Rocket Engines and Interplanetary Travel*. To prepare for the presentation, I had to read a collection of Tsiolkovsky's scientific and fantastical works, as well as many other books.

From the age of twelve, like all children, I was captivated by the works of Jack London, Jules Verne, and Alexander Belyaev. There was a queue for fantasy novels in the Gzhatsk library. We retold them to each other and envied whoever read the book first.

Tsiolkovsky was a completely different kind of writer. I was captivated by his foresight, his ability to see the future with remarkable accuracy. He wrote that the era of propeller airplanes would be followed by the era of jet airplanes — and they were already flying in the sky over Saratov. He wrote about rockets — and they were already soaring over Soviet land, albeit only into the stratosphere.

In short, what Tsiolkovsky predicted was coming true before our eyes:

> Humanity will not remain forever on Earth, and in pursuit of light and space, will first timidly penetrate beyond the atmosphere, and then conquer the entire solar space.

Perhaps it was with the presentation on Tsiolkovsky's work that my "cosmic" biography began. A pilot was born in the foundry. I decided to start with the aero club. To be honest, my friends Vitya Porokhnya and Zhenya Steshin and I thought it would take about a week—and we would start flying. It turned out that everything was not so simple: we had to diligently study theory, master practical skills—in short, work, work, and work again...

I remember the day of my first parachute jump. Whether it was very noisy in the plane or I was very nervous, I did not hear the instructor's command to climb onto the wing. I only saw his gesture: it was time!

I climbed over the edge of the cabin and looked down. I had never been at such a height before...

> Don't be afraid, Yuri, the girls are watching from below! — the instructor encouraged me.

Indeed, my aero club friends were waiting their turn on the ground.

> Here I go...

I landed successfully.

And then everything seemed easy; I wanted to descend under the white canopy again and again.

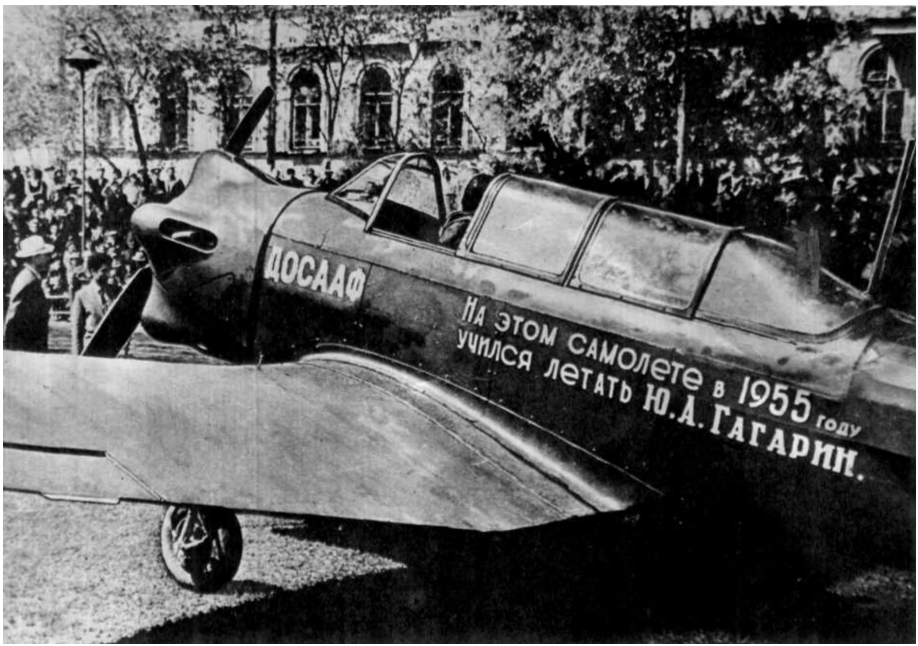
After graduation, I simply could not give up, could not abandon the air. I applied to the Orenburg Aviation School. And although I did not become a foundry technician, I can confidently say that the knowledge and professional skills I gained during my studies were useful in life. But most importantly — I learned to work in a team and live with friends who shared common interests.

Only once did I almost betray my dream, almost stray from my chosen path. And thank you to my friends: they helped me not make a mistake.

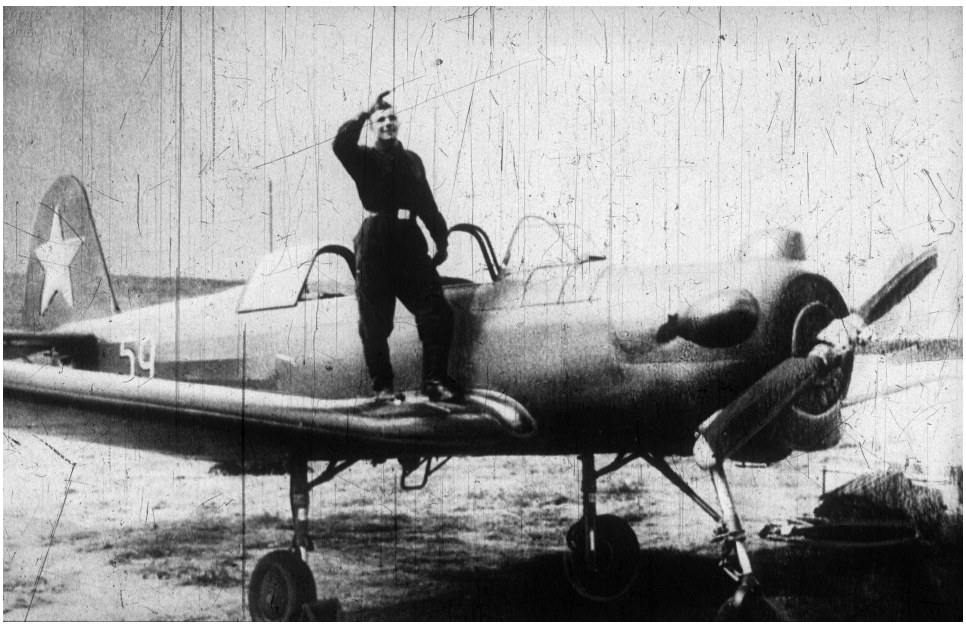
Here's what happened. In Orenburg, during my first year at the aviation school, I received a sad letter from home. My father had fallen ill, and my mother was having a hard time.

I was drawn to Gzhatsk. The thought occurred to me:

> I'll quit everything, go to my



The aircraft on which Yuri Gagarin learned to fly.



In Saratov, there was an aeroclub. Here, Gagarin fulfilled his first dream: he took to the sky in a *Yak-18* aircraft. But, of course, he first had to learn—he was a student pilot.

family, and get a job at the factory...

I shared what was troubling me with my friends.

Yura, don't be sad, they advised me.

Don't be reckless.

Finish school, and you will be able to help your parents.

Valya understood my emotional state. At that time, we were not yet married, but we were already close friends. On my birthday, she gave me a photo album with the inscription:

Yura, remember that we are the blacksmiths of our own happiness. Do not bow your head before fate.

I read these lines and thought:

Could it be that cadet Gagarin really wanted to quit aviation school? Could it be that he decided to give up his beloved work, his dream?

It's pointless to speculate with "what ifs." But it's easy to imagine how differently my life would have turned out if I hadn't listened to the good advice of Valya and other friends.

When Yuri Gagarin made his first solo flight, he realised that he had fallen in love with the sky for life.

We Draw Spaceships

The years of study in Orenburg coincided with the first Soviet successes in conquering space. After the launch of the artificial satellite, heated debates flared up in the Lenin room of the school near the radio:

Soon, a human will fly into space...

Soon? You're too quick! In fifteen or twenty years... By then, you'll be retired from aviation!

The first one to fly will be on a satellite, of course. Where else would a laboratory ship come from?

Not necessarily. A person with iron health is needed. Like a miner or a test pilot.

In my opinion, a doctor will be chosen for the first flight into space. After all, the main thing is to test how the human body reacts...

Of course, we never came to a single conclusion. And even when sketching the future spacecraft, everyone imagined it differently.

I drew too.

How different my project was from the *Vostok-1*, from whose board I saw the Earth from space five years later!

We were particularly impressed by the news of the launch of the second artificial satellite with a dog on board.

If a living creature has already ascended into space, I thought, why shouldn't a human fly there?

I joined the group of debaters who believed the launch of the first cosmonaut was a matter of the near future.
And time passed.

Valya and Yuri.

Happy events also occurred. More precisely, they coincided: I donned the uniform of an aviation lieutenant and married Valya. Orenburg gave me a lot — both a family and command over an airplane.
From the Ural steppes, our path led north, to the land of long polar nights. There—service, there—practice. I flew a lot and studied even more. I engaged in theoretical disciplines and spent almost all my free time reading.
I would bring firewood to the room, light the stove. Valya would prepare dinner and ask:

Read something aloud...

Even novels and stories I now tried to choose about the life of pilots.
And Valya quickly became captivated by this theme.
So life went on, rushing forward. The third cosmic rocket photographed the invisible side of the Moon.

"What amazing precision!" I noted to myself. "So very soon..."

A few days later, I submitted a report requesting to be enrolled in the cosmonaut training group, if such a group already existed.

With Yelena and Galina.

Why did I decide to make such a statement? It's hard to answer. But now it is known for

With Valya — his partner for life.

sure that I was not the only one to decide this: there were many similar applications, and not only from pilots.

I had something in my favor: I was young, healthy, and felt good during flights and parachute jumps. But, I confess, I did not have much hope for the success of my application.

> "There will be thousands and thousands better than me," I thought.

But how I rejoiced when the summons from Moscow arrived! I passed the first, very thorough medical commission, after which I had to return to the North. The final answer was long in coming. Valya sensed that I was nervous, but she did not guess the real reason. However, there was no need to tell her when nothing was decided yet. After all, I knew that Valya would not stand in the way of my plans and would be happy for me. We were already used to having the same dreams and aspirations.

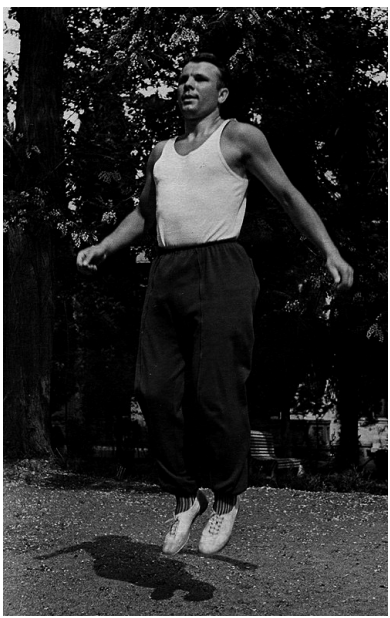
A birthday is a wonderful holiday. Perhaps not more than one in a thousand people does not celebrate such a day. On the eve of my twenty-fifth birthday, I received the rarest of gifts: a summons to Moscow.

With Yelena and Galina.

I understood what that meant.

The Gagarin family.

Excursion On Board The "Vostok"



"Let's get acquainted": Titov.
My name is Andriyan...
Gagarin, Yuri.
First meetings, first acquaintances. We all looked at each other with curiosity. Sincere, simple, ordinary guys!
Immediately, confidence in our abilities grew.
We settled near Moscow, in the place now commonly known as "Star City". Right away, we realized that we would have to work hard. And most importantly, there wasn't much time left: scientists and engineers had practically completed all the necessary preparations.
We were trained for flights by specialists from various fields of knowledge. We studied the basics of rocket and space technology, the structure of the spacecraft, geophysics, astronomy, and medicine. Besides theory, a lot of time was spent on physical training. Gymnastics was supplemented by ball games, diving from a springboard, cycling. We exercised regularly, in any weather, under the supervision of doctors.
Soon, it was time for special training—tests in an anechoic chamber with absolute silence, on a high-speed centrifuge, in a thermo-chamber with hot air, and in air-

Doctors carefully check the astronaut's health.

planes where weightlessness was simulated.

Doctors carefully monitored the health of the cosmonauts.

The spacecraft was also being prepared. I first saw it in the summer of 1960, nine months before the launch.

Everyone liked the future "Vostok." We also learned that when the spacecraft enters the dense layers of the atmosphere, its shell heats up to several thousand degrees...

> Gagarin is fine—he's a foundryman, used to standing by a red-hot furnace, — someone joked.
>
> Maybe a few thousand degrees is too much even for Yuri, — said another.
>
> We won't melt somehow!

Right away, we got acquainted with the thermal protection of the spacecraft. And, looking ahead, I will say that during all our flights, the temperature in the cabin was normal.

I want to tell you about the spacecraft. Of course, "Vostok-1" differs from subsequent spacecraft, but the basic principles are the same. The spacecraft has two compartments. The first is the "living" compartment. This is the pilot's cabin with the control panel. The second compartment contains the braking system that ensures the spacecraft's landing.

The largest object in the cabin is the seat. It has an ejection system similar to those on jet aircraft. Upon command, the seat with the person is ejected from the spacecraft. In addition to the ejection system, the seat has a life raft, a supply of food, a radio for communication, and a first-aid kit.

Probably, all or almost all readers have seen the interior of the spacecraft in movies or on television. There is a lot of complex radio equipment and optical devices. Through the portholes, the pilot observes what is happening outside the spacecraft. The porthole glasses are exceptionally strong, comparable to metal.

But in addition, protection from the bright, unlike Earth's, solar rays is needed. Therefore, the portholes have special shutters.

The cabin houses devices and systems that ensure normal living and working conditions for the cosmonaut: air temperature, humidity, oxygen content, and more.

Extraordinary precision in calculations accompanied us from launch to landing.

All instruments worked flawlessly. I will

The spacecraft “Vostok”.

tell you more about one instrument. It resembles a globe, an ordinary globe like the one in every school. During the flight, this globe rotates. And at any moment, we could accurately determine which point on Earth the spacecraft was over. The control of the spacecraft is so perfect that it evoked a genuine sense of admiration for the scientists and engineers among us cosmonauts.

As you know, the spacecraft is launched into space by a multi-stage rocket. As soon as "Vostok" reaches the desired altitude, it separates from the carrier rocket and continues to fly independently. The speed is about eight kilometers per second.

Soviet rockets are unmatched in power, reliability, and precision. The rocket that launched "Vostok" into Earth orbit had a total engine power of about 20,000,000 horsepower.

One Hundred Eight Minutes

It has now become a tradition: before departing for the cosmodrome, cosmonauts visit Red Square, the Kremlin, and the Mausoleum of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

One day, I walked through a frosty but spring-anticipating Moscow.

Thousands of people walked down Gorky Street, passing me by. And no one, of course, knew that a grand event, unprecedented in history, was being prepared. I stood by the Kremlin wall, looked again at Lenin's Mausoleum, and descended to the Moscow River... That same night, I flew to Baikonur.

Together with me, flying to the cosmodrome were Gherman Titov, a few other cosmonauts, a group of scientific researchers, and a doctor. The fears of those who suggested not informing us about the flight day to avoid nervousness proved unfounded. Both I and Gherman, who was ready to take the seat in the "Vostok" if needed, felt great.

We were ready. But the long-awaited decision of the state commission was announced only at the cosmodrome: I was appointed commander of "Vostok-1", and Gherman Titov as my backup.

Until April 11, Gherman and I studied the flight schedule and practiced the mission el-

Y.O. Gagarin and Academician S.P. Korolyov.

ements. We had to memorize all the operations to be performed during the flight. The creators of the spacecraft and outstanding Soviet scientists assisted us in this.

We also got used to the "space kitchen" — juices and pâtés to be consumed from special tubes.

The day before the flight was reserved for complete rest. In the small house where Gherman and I lived, soft music played. We didn't talk about the flight. We reminisced about childhood, books we had read, and movies we had seen. We cheerfully laughed, recalling various amusing incidents and adventures. Besides the doctor, who was with us almost all the time, friends from the unit and the Chief Designer visited.

We went to bed at nine in the evening. I don't remember dreaming anything. At half past five in the morning, the doctor woke us up. Gherman got up, humming a playful tune as always. Final check. Everything was normal.

I was helped into my spacesuit. Right there, I gave my first autographs ever.

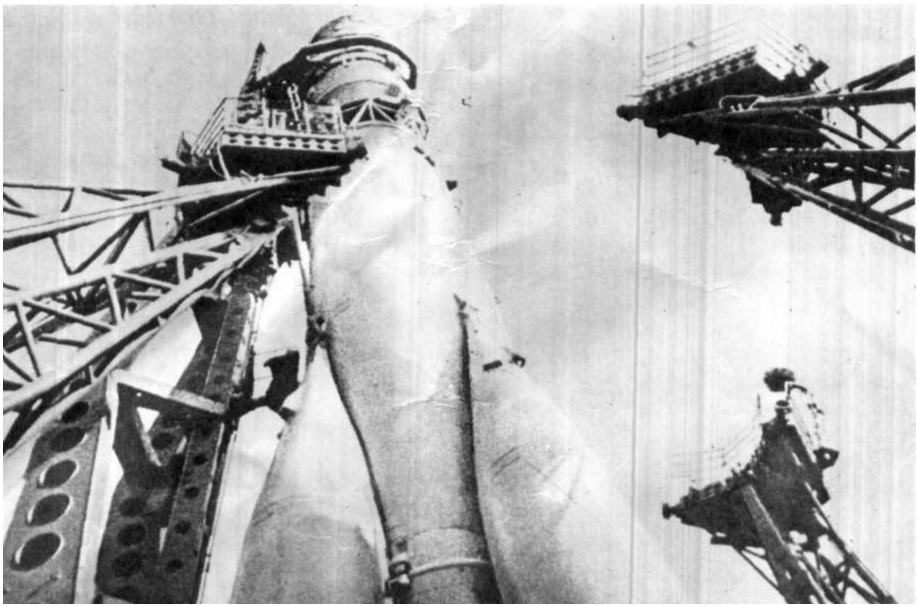
Then, Gherman and I boarded a special bus where the cosmic life begins. The spacesuit is connected to devices supplying air.

At the base of the rocket — a huge structure pointing to the sky — I said goodbye to those seeing us off and took the elevator to the top of the rocket. The statement I made a few minutes earlier is well-known. It was printed in newspapers and broadcast on the radio. However, I want to recall a few phrases I said at the cosmodrome. They accurately reflected my emotional state before the flight, my feelings, and thoughts:

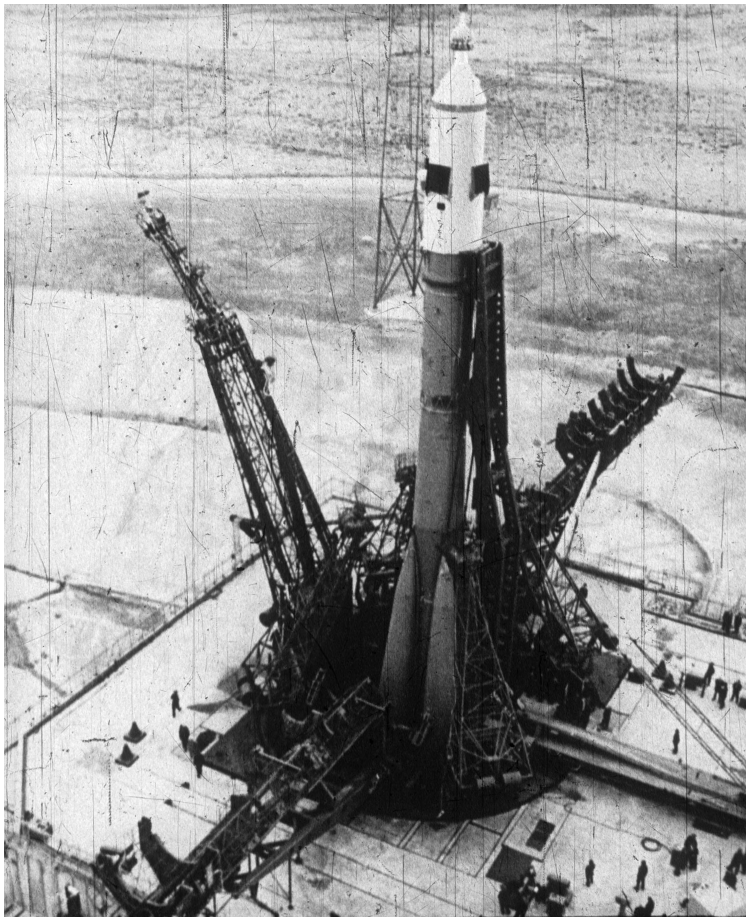
"Am I happy to embark on this space flight? Of course, I am happy. After all, in all times and epochs, the greatest happiness for people has been to participate in new discoveries. I would like to dedicate this first space flight to the people of communism... There are only a few minutes left until the launch. I say goodbye to you, dear friends, as people say to each other when embarking on a long journey. How I would like to embrace you all, acquaintances and strangers, distant and close!"

Now I was alone among numerous instruments, illuminated by artificial light. Only the radio connected me with the outside world.

Of course, I was nervous—only a robot wouldn't be nervous in such moments and circumstances. But at the same time, I was confident that the flight would be successful, that nothing unforeseen by our scientists and technicians would happen. I was



The rocket with the “Vostok” spacecraft at the launch site.



"Vostok" is ready for launch.

confident in the perfection of the rocket, the spacesuit, the instruments, the communication with Earth, and the quality of the food. Apparently, I had certainty. All this together was called "readiness for the space flight."

What was I thinking, sitting in the chair of the spacecraft before launch? The communication equipment had already been checked. Music was playing: friends had made sure I wouldn't feel lonely. Sixty minutes of "free time" remained.

They hadn't yet calculated the speed of human thought, and what distance it can cover in an hour! I remembered a distant day when I was tied the pioneer neckerchief. I learned that the word "pioneer" means "scout," "explorer," "the first to pave the way." What a wonderful word! It's a shame that not all of us keep our first pioneer neckerchief as our most precious memory until the end of our days...

I had to become a pioneer again, the first person to break away from Earth, to overcome its gravitational pull. Of all the bold human dreams, this one, perhaps, has always been considered unattainable, like a fairy tale.

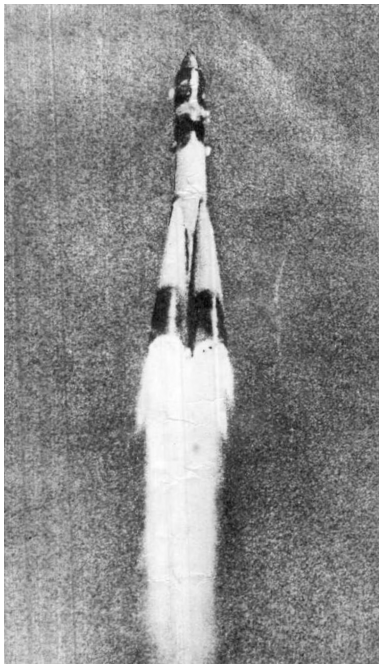
The rocket engines were ignited at 9:07 AM. Immediately, the G-forces began to increase. I was literally pressed into my seat. As soon as "Vostok" pierced the dense layers of the atmosphere, I saw the Earth. The spacecraft flew over a wide Siberian river. Islands were clearly visible on it, and the sunlit wooded banks.

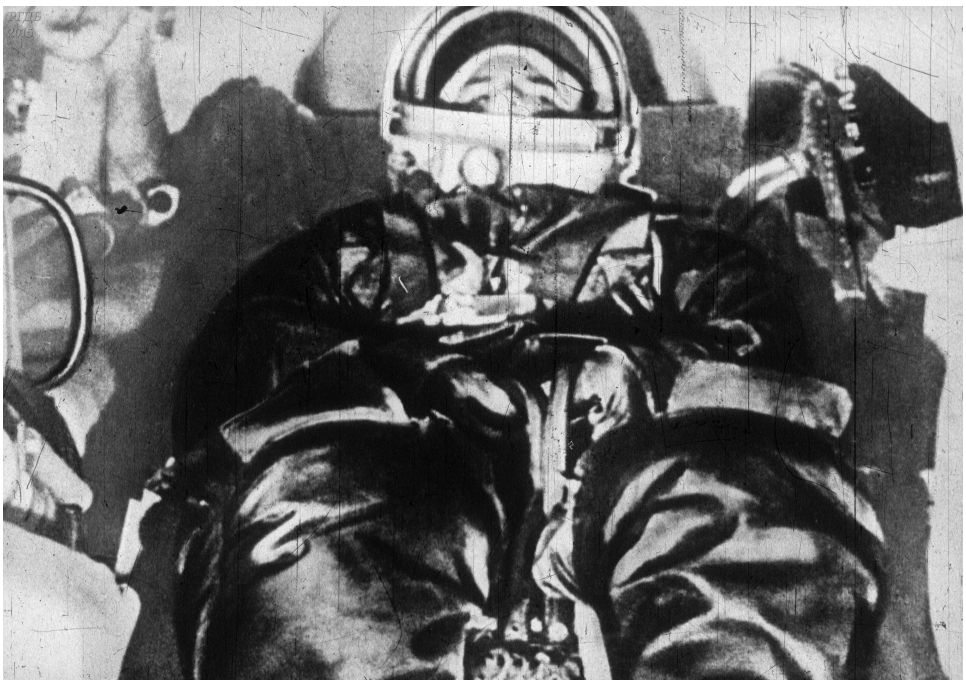
I looked at the sky and then at the Earth. Mountain ranges, large lakes, and even fields were clearly distinguishable.

"Vostok" returned to Earth.

The most beautiful sight was the horizon—a band colored with all the hues of the rainbow, separating the Earth in the bright sunlight from the black sky. The curvature of the Earth was noticeable. It seemed as if the entire planet was enveloped in a halo of tender blue, which transitioned through turquoise, blue, and violet to dark blue...

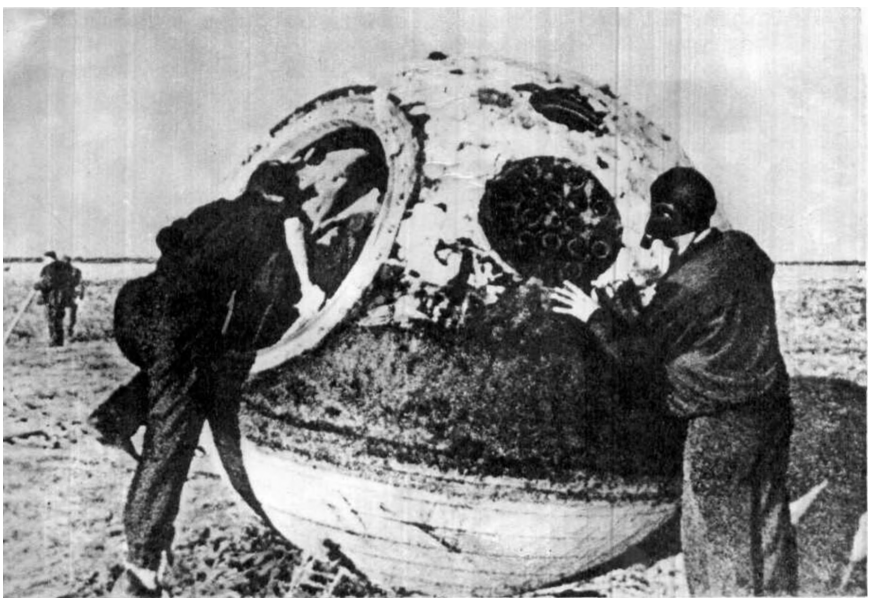
Weightlessness, to which I quickly got used, played a trick on me. After making an entry in the flight log, I let go of the pencil, and it floated freely around the cabin along with the clipboard. But unexpectedly, the string that secured the pencil came loose, and it darted somewhere under the seat. I never saw it again. I had to transmit my further observations by radio and record them on a tape recorder.





Except for this minor incident, nothing unexpected happened. The pre-planned flight schedule was followed precisely. Until the descent, everything went approximately as we had calculated on Earth.

At 10:25 AM, the braking device automatically activated. The spacecraft entered the dense layers of the atmosphere. Through the shutters covering the portholes, I saw a crimson glow flashing around the spacecraft. Weightlessness disappeared, and the increasing G-forces pressed me back into my seat. They were stronger than during the launch.



At 10:55 AM, 108 minutes after launch, "Vostok" safely landed in the field of the "Leninsky Put" collective farm near the village of Smelovka.

In my bright orange spacesuit, I must have looked strange.

The first Earthlings, a woman and a girl, were afraid to approach me. They were Anna Yakimovna Takhtarova and her granddaughter Rita.

Then, mechanics from the field station ran up, and we hugged and kissed. In those less than two hours I spent in space, the radio had carried the news of the launch here and to all corners of the Earth. My name was already known to those who met me.

"Vostok" landed a few dozen meters from a deep ravine where spring waters flowed. The spacecraft was charred and scorched, but because of that, it seemed even better and dearer to me than before the flight...

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21 PAGES TODAY

The Huntsville Times

Where Progress...

Covers The Valley!

VOL. 93, NO. 21 | CHICAGO DAILY NEWS SERVICE | HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA, WEDNESDAY, APR. 12, 1961 | ASSOCIATED PRESS — WIREPHOTO | 45c PER WEEK

Man Enters Space

'So Close, Yet So Far,' Sighs Cape

U.S. Had Hoped For Own Launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The Redstone rocket which the United States had hoped would boost the first man into space stands on a launching pad here. The Soviet Union beat its firing date by at least two weeks.

"So close, yet so far," commented a technician who is helping groom the Redstone to send one of America's astronauts on a short sub-orbital flight, hopefully late this month or early in May.

"We we hadn't had those two jobs and fail and on the chimp and Little Joe shots this year we might have made it." the technician said.

"But you have to give the Russian scientists credit. They've accomplished a remarkable break-through."

Dr. Hugh Dryden, deputy director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, told the House Space Committee in Washington Tuesday that the earliest possible date for the manned launching is about April 26.

Project Mercury officials had hoped to achieve a manned Redstone flight last December or January. A series of launch mishaps necessitated additional launchings to qualify the system.

On May 5, a space capsule is set to separate from a Little Joe rocket fired from Wallops Island, Va., in a test of the escape system.

Two weeks later, a Redstone is slated because of a faulty control system which caused the escape tower to fire, sending the rocket and capsule on the wild. That test is to be repeated before Hamm, the space chimpanzee, is sent up on a short trip Jan. 31.

An earlier short [illegible] on the chimp shot, covering an [illegible] which caused the escape tower to fire, sending the rocket and capsule on the wild. That test is to be repeated before Hamm, the space chimpanzee, is sent up on a short trip Jan. 31.

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Hobbs Admits 1944 Slaying

By ROY WARD
Of The Times Staff

[illegible] Hobbs confessed today to the brutal murder in 1944 of Mrs. Margaret Thornton Fleming, Circuit Solicitor Macon L. Weaver said.

Hobbs, now 43, is held by the Air Force authorities at Little Air Force Base, Fla. He signed a statement there detailing his [illegible] slaying of the prominent Montgomery woman, Weaver said he learned from Air Force officials.

[illegible] was last under [illegible] treatment by [illegible] Fla. [illegible] had recovered [illegible] Weaver was told. Psychiatrists said Hobbs appeared competent to [illegible] Hobbs' "technical" rather than [illegible] murder charge.

Hobbs was [illegible] Montgomery [illegible] Air Force Base, near Tampa, Fla., from Feb. 6, 1959, [illegible] Weaver said. [illegible] Hobbs was [illegible] Air Force officials [illegible] Hobbs [illegible] Weaver said he [illegible] Hobbs [illegible] Weaver said he [illegible] Hobbs [illegible] Weaver said he

Waiting For New Starts!

After the flight, it became simply impossible to wander through evening Moscow, to come to Red Square without being noticed or recognised. Popularity is an irreversible thing. One can only think: why and to whom do you owe it? A foreign correspondent asked me:

> Are you not tired, Gagarin, of the popularity your name has gained since 12 April 1961? Now, surely, you are guaranteed rest for life...
>
> Rest? I objected to him. — In our Soviet Union, everyone works, and most of all—those who are well-known, Heroes of the Soviet Union and Heroes of Socialist Labour.

The number of tasks has not decreased after the first spaceflights; rather, it has increased. We all continue to study, improving our knowledge in the field of space travel. We have not left the cosmonaut corps but, as before, work daily in classrooms and laboratories, passing on our experience to the next generation.

Wonderful young men are preparing to continue our mission! For them, it will be both easier and harder than for us. Easier—because we have already learned so much.

Harder—because with each flight, the tasks become more complex, and so does the equipment.

My friends, I hope they will forgive me for revealing our shared secret: not a single one of us, cosmonauts who have been to space, has given up the thought of once again "taking a look" at our blue planet...

A solemn cortege on the streets of Moscow.

Prague welcomes the world's first pilot-cosmonaut.

Soviet cosmonauts at a press conference at the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Bulgarian pioneers tie a neckerchief on Yuri Gagarin.

To The Young Readers

Together with you, dear children, I have once again read my son's story and the sincere words of his friend—German Titov.

If someone asked me: what is happiness? I would answer: *happiness is when a mother can be proud of her children.*

There were four children in our family: Valentin, Zoya, Yura, and Boris.

The eldest, Valentin, started helping his father with carpentry at an early age.

I remember them repairing the porch, and a neighbour passing by said, "Well done, Valya, you take after your father — so diligent."

Zoya helped with household chores. When Yura was born, she looked after him. At that time, I worked as a milkmaid in a collective farm. Zoya would bring Yura to the farm so I could feed him. The women working with me would call out:

"Nyura, Nyura, your little helper is here!"

And the helper was only seven years old!

Yura and Boris grew up and began taking care of the livestock, carrying water, and watering the garden.

Of course, when someone says a kind word, it makes work easier. But I was happy

that my children helped without waiting for praise. Sometimes, when Oleksiy Ivanovych and I came home from work, the house was already cleaned, the stove heated, and dinner cooked.

Yu. A. Gagarin with his parents heading to a rally in the city park. Gzhatsk, 1961.

Our children, satisfied, were already sitting at the table waiting for us. And our hearts felt lighter!

We loved our children very much. But they also understood and cared for us, their parents.

Once, toward the end of the war, something happened. Boris and Yura came home. I looked at Boris—his face was black, his eyebrows singed.

— They were playing with homemade gunpowder...

— My heart nearly stopped; they could have burned their eyes. I approached Yura and quietly said: "You must not! Understand, you must not!"

And I couldn't say another word—my breath caught, and tears welled up in my eyes. My sons looked at me and must have understood everything. From that day on, they never made gunpowder again.

My children studied well, especially Zoya and Yura. Yura was always an excellent student — at school, at the technical college, and he graduated from the academy with honours.

Once — Yura was already studying at the aviation school—a letter arrived.

I opened the envelope and read. The head of the school wrote: "Hanna Tymofiyivna, you can be proud of your son! The command thanks you."

I thought: when he was little, neighbours praised him for his good deeds; as he grew, his teachers did, and now even his commander wrote to me. My son had become a good and righteous person! After his flight into space, our whole family gathered for my birthday. Yura stood up and said: "Thank you, Mother, for teaching us to work from childhood. You taught us to do every task

excellently. That is the most important thing in life."

On my seventieth birthday, the Soviet government awarded me the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. The award ceremony took place at the Palace of Culture. Many people spoke, recalling how I had worked on the collective farm. It was pleasant to know that my work was remembered and appreciated.

But my greatest joy was hearing about my children—about the factory master Valentyn Oleksiyovych, the nurse Zoya Oleksiivna, the Communist Labour shock worker and grinder Borys Oleksiyovych, and the first cosmonaut, Yuriy Gagarin...

All mothers rejoice and take pride when their children study well, work hard, and grow up brave, kind, and honest—true sons and daughters of the Soviet Motherland.

I have lived many years and seen much of the world. While following my son's earthly orbits, I visited Leningrad, the city of my childhood.

I travelled to the Baltics and Belarus. I was in Ukraine, where I have many friends.

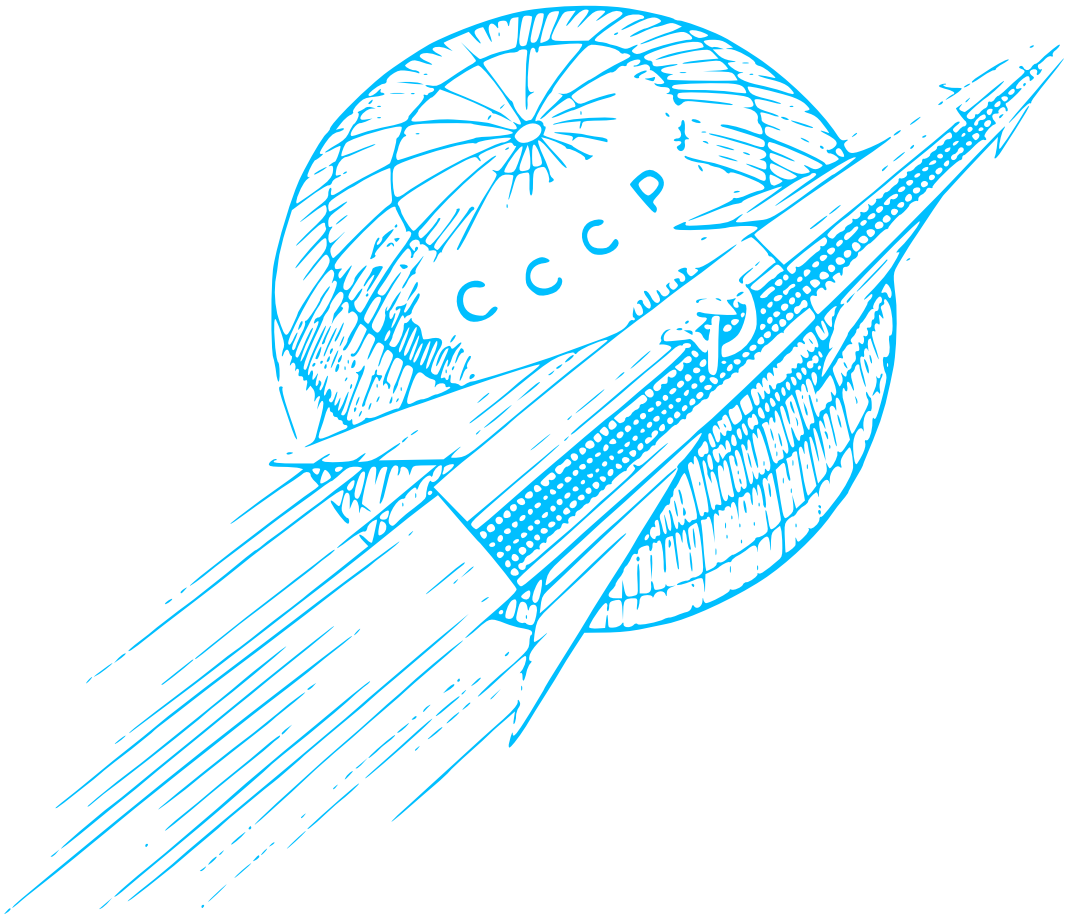
At our estate near Yura's memorial museum, apple trees of the "Gagarin's Peer" variety, bred by Ukrainian horticulturists, are growing. And in the village of Mliiv, Cherkasy region, apple trees are reaching for the sun—grown from seeds that spent six months in orbit on the Soyuz-Salyut-6 complex. Together with cosmonaut Volodymyr Lyakhov, we planted the first space orchard on Earth.

One such apple tree grows near the "Veselka" children's literature publishing house in Kyiv. Another was planted near the school where Yura studied, alongside the larch he once planted with his own hands.

New spacecraft launch into the Starry Ocean, and orchards bear new fruits. Perhaps they will bloom even on Mars one day? But neither rockets will fly without human effort, nor will the Earth reveal its abundance without labourers.

And that labourer should be you, young reader. I trust in you as I would my own child.

ANNA TIMOFEYEVNA GAGARINA
Mother of the Cosmonaut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